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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses multiple perspectives on the quality of early childhood care and education, including lessons learned from programs in various countries, the implications of these perspectives, and recommendations for the improvement of early childhood provision. It also examines the ideas expressed in the 1994 "Start Right" report on early childhood provision issued by the Royal Society for the Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce in London, England. The paper reviews five perspectives on quality: (1) top-down, which focuses on caregiver-child ratios, staff qualifications, and physical environment; (2) bottom-up, which considers the views of the children in the program; (3) inside, or staff views; (4) outside-in, which focuses on parent attitudes; and (5) outside, or the community and society at-large. The paper recommends the strengthening of early childhood teacher education programs, the use of mixed-age grouping in early childhood programs, and the use of parent cooperative models of early childhood provision, by which all parents would have direct involvement in their young children's care and education. (Contains 33 references.) (MDM)

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Multiple Perspectives on Starting Right*

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Multiple Perspectives on Starting Right

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In his invitation to address in this conference, Sir Christopher asked me to examine the *Start Right Report* (Ball, 1994) from a global perspective, and to explore some possible directions for the future. In approaching these tasks I want to emphasize that even though I began my life and learning in this very city, my training and professional experience has been mainly in the US. I am well aware of the risks of discussing such culture-bound issues as child rearing and early education in another country with traditions, habits, and contingencies different from those I know best. I might add that I am often alarmed by the rapid adoption of US practices, and just wish that people would be highly selective concerning which of them to adopt into their own countries! Nevertheless, I leave to you the determination which of the ideas set out below are applicable and useful in your own context.

However, having said that, I am as often impressed by the similarities across countries as I am by the differences. Indeed, my international experience suggests to me--as least as an hypothesis--that colleagues who do the same kind of work across countries understand each other better than they understand or are understood by those within their own countries who work in different sectors within the same field. It is likely for example, that teachers of young children, (or teacher educators, educational administrators,

or other job-alike groups), understand each other *across* countries better than than they are understood by local participants in other sectors of their own field (e.g. the officials who make policy *within* their own countries), and vice versa. In other words, the nature of our work is probably a more powerful determinant of our beliefs, ideologies, assumptions, and policy preferences, and frustrations, than is the larger national cultural context and political system in which that work is performed.

With few exceptions the global picture of early childhood provision and practices suggests that the gap between what we know and what we do seems everywhere to be as great as ever. From all reports, early childhood education in Scandinavian countries seems to exemplify good quality. However, not having been there, I cannot say so from direct experience. My two visits to New Zealand certainly convinced me that there is much for all of us to learn from them, as can readily be seen from Anne Meade's paper at this conference. The most stunning achievement of high quality at present that I know of directly is to be seen in Reggio Emilia in northern Italy. However, discussion of their work would require much more time than is available today, and should be presented to you by the Reggio Emiliani themselves!

What I propose to do in the time available is to take up a set of issues raised by examining the *Start Right Report* (1994) by first addressing multiple perspectives on the quality of early childhood provisions, including lessons from other countries, to set out some of the implications of these perspectives, and then to close with some recommendations and possible next steps for the future.

Multiple Perspectives on Quality

Today, the issue of how to raise the quality of programs for young children, in the United States and most other countries, remains high on early childhood conference agenda. The research available to date strongly suggests that any early childhood program in any context that is less than top quality represents a missed opportunity to make a substantial contribution to the quality of children's lives, and to their entire futures. This point is made very clearly in the *Start Right Report*[1] (Ball, 1994) Questions about what criteria and assessment procedures should be used to determine and to judge quality are as complex for early childhood programs as they are for any other professional service.

Most of the available literature on the quality of early childhood programs suggests that quality can be assessed by identifying selected characteristics of the program, the setting, the equipment, and other features, as seen from above by those in charge of the program or responsible for its licensure, supervision, inspection and accreditation. Such an approach can be called an assessment of quality from a *top-down* perspective. Another approach is to take what might be called a *bottom-up* perspective by attempting to determine how the program is actually experienced by the participating children. A third perspective is one from the *inside*, which considers how the program is experienced by the staff who work within it. A fourth approach, which could be called an *outside-in* perspective, is to assess how the program is experienced by the families served by it. A fifth perspective takes into account how the community and the

[1] The Start Right Report is referred to as the RSA report throughout, for the sake of simplicity.

larger society is served by a program. This can be called the *outside, societal* and in some sense, the *ultimate* perspective on program quality.

It has only recently come to my attention that Peter Moss and his colleagues at the Thomas Corum Center at the University of London Institute of Education have a very similar approach to examining the problems of quality in that they have identified various "stakeholder" groups to consider (Moss, 1994; 1995). However, Moss's "inclusionary" model deals more with the goals of stakeholders and who sets the goals and how, than with the experiences the stakeholders actually have.

The main thesis of this paper is that criteria of quality representing all five perspectives merit consideration in determining the quality of provisions for the care and education of young children. Needless to say, this approach to quality definition and assessment raises complex issues concerning the determinants of quality and how accountability for it should be defined.

Top-down Perspective on Quality

The *top-down* perspective on quality typically takes into account criteria such as:

- ratio of adults to children;
- qualifications and stability of the staff;
- characteristics of adult-child interaction;
- quality and quantity of equipment and materials;
- quality and quantity of space per child;
- health, hygiene and fire safety provisions, and so forth.

According to Fiene (1992), program features like those listed above, and typically included in licensing guidelines, are useful as a basis for regulatory strategies to ensure the quality of child care, in that they are directly observable and enforceable ways by which providers can "set the stage for desirable interaction..." (p. 2). They are also program features that are relatively easy to quantify and require relatively little inference on the part of the assessor.

A briefing paper titled Child Care: Quality is the Issue, prepared by the Child Care Action Campaign and produced by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (Ehrlich, n. d.), acknowledges that there is no single definition of quality for the variety of types of child care settings in the US. However, the briefing paper lists among the basic components of quality the ratio of children to adults, the size of groups, the availability of staff training, and staff turnover rates (p. 4). A recent and more extensive study of quality (Whitebook, 1995) of the top-down type reveals not surprisingly, that in general the quality of child care in the US is "disturbing--especially the finding that a large proportion of infant care may be harming children's development and learning (p. 39).

Thus there is already substantial evidence to suggest that the program and setting features listed above and commonly included in top-down criteria of quality do indeed predict some effects of early childhood programs (Love, 1993; Beardsley, 1990; Harms & Clifford, 1980; Howes, et al, 1992; Phillips, 1987).

The Bottom-Up Perspective on Quality

A major hypothesis put forward here is that the significant and lasting effects of a program depend primarily on how it is experienced from below, i.e. how it is experienced by the children it is designed to serve. In other words, the actual

or true predictor of a program's effects is the day-to-day quality of life experienced by each participating child.

Bottom-up Criteria. If it is the case that the child's subjective experience of a program is the true determinant of its effects, meaningful assessment of program quality requires answers to the central question, What does it feel like to be a child in this environment day after day[2]? This approach requires making inferences about how each child would--so to speak--answer questions like the following:

- Do I usually feel welcome rather than captured?
- Do I usually feel that I belong rather than just one of the crowd?
- Do I usually feel accepted, understood and protected by the adults, rather than neglected or scolded by them?
- Am I usually accepted by some of my peers rather than isolated or rejected by them?
- Am I usually addressed seriously and respectfully, rather than as someone who is "precious" or "cute"?
- Do I find most of the activities <u>intellectually</u> engaging, absorbing, and challenging, rather than just fun, amusing, entertaining or exciting?
- Do I find most of the experiences interesting, rather than frivolous or boring?
- Do I find most of the activities meaningful, rather than mindless or trivial?
- Do I find most of my experiences satisfying, rather than frustrating or confusing?
- Am I usually glad to be here, rather than reluctant to come and eager to leave?

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[2] The inferred answers to this question should reflect the nature of experience over a given period of time, depending upon the age of the child. Hence the term *usually* is repeated in most of the questions in the list.

There is general agreement that on most days, each child in an early childhood program should feel welcome, feel that he or she belongs in the group, and should feel accepted, understood and protected by those in charge.

The remaining questions in the set concerning other aspects of the child's experiences, however, are included to emphasize the importance of addressing young children's real need to feel intellectually engaged and respected, and to encourage all responsible for them to do more than just keep them busy and happy or even excited. It is my view that too often assessments of early years programs settle for children being kept busy, having fun, and just playing.

The last question on the criteria list reflects my assumption that when the intellectual vitality of a program is strong, most children, on most days, will be eager to participate and be reluctant to leave the program. Their eagerness will be based on more than just the "fun" aspects of their participation. Of course, there are potentially many other factors that influence children's eagerness or reluctance to participate in a program. Any program and any child can have an "off" day or two. I will return to these criteria later in this discussion.

Experience Sampling. The older the children served by a program, the longer the time period required for a reliable bottom-up assessment. Three to four weeks of assessment for preschoolers, and slightly longer periods of assessment for older children may provide sufficient sampling to make reliable predictions of significant developmental outcomes. Occasional exciting events, one-off excursions, festivals, etc. experienced in early childhood programs are unlikely to affect long-term development.

Cumulative Effects. Assessment of the quality of experience over appropriate time periods helps address the potential *cumulative effects* of experience. My assumption here is that some childhood experiences, if rare, may be benign or inconsequential, but if experienced frequently, may be harmful or beneficial. For example, being rebuffed by peers once in a while should not be a debilitating experience for a preschooler; but the cumulative effects of frequent rebuffs may undermine long term social development substantially. Similarly, block play, project work, and other developmentally appropriate activities may not support long term development if they are rare or occasional experiences, but can do so if they are frequent[3].

Of course children do not pose such questions to themselves. In general they accept their experience, not knowing that it might be otherwise. Even if it were possible to get responses to such questions, on ethical grounds, we would not put them to young children, though some explorations into assessing children's subjective experience have been reported (Armstrong, 1994; Sang, 1994).

When we can safely assume that most of the answers to the questions as phrased above are at the positive end of the continua implied in them, we can assume that the quality of the program is worthy of the children. However, the question of how positive a response has to be on each *criterion* to meet a *standard* of good quality remains to be determined.

Needless to say, there are many possible explanations for any of the answers children might give--if they could--to the questions listed above. A program should not automatically be faulted for every negative response. In other words, the causes of children's negative subjective

[3] The potential cumulative effects of early experience also suggest that we should ensure that any system of quality control or supervision should be based on repeated and frequent contact with the program.

experiences cannot always or solely be attributed to the staff. For what then, can the staff be appropriately held accountable? I suggest that while they cannot be held accountable for all possible cases of negative experiences, they are accountable for applying all practices acknowledged and accepted *by the profession* to be relevant and appropriate to the situation at hand.

In sum, I propose that the quality of a program is good if it is experienced from the bottom-up as intellectually as well as socially engaging and satisfying on most days, and is not dependent on occasional exciting special events.

However, before we turn to the next perspective I want to take up some issues related to the bottom-up perspective raised by the RSA report.

First, the RSA report lists 6 types of learning: knowledge, understanding, skills, experience, attitudes, and values (Ball, 1994. p. 54). Aside from the fact that children always learn--even if what they learn is that "this is an unpleasant place for me to be"! Children always "understand," even though they may understand differently from the way we think they should and ultimately will. It is also not clear what "experience" means in this list of desired learnings. Children always 'experience,' all the time. What does it mean to list experience as a goal, other than to suggest that a good program provides particular kinds of experience. Thus this item needs some further clarification.

Dispositions as educational goals. The main issue I want raise here is that what should be added, or perhaps made explicit rather than implicit in this list, is the importance of learning--or better still--strengthening desirable *dispositions* and weakening undesirable ones (see Katz, 1995, Chapter 3). Dispositions are very difficult to define, However, for the present I suggest that they are best thought

of as habits of mind with motivational and affective components. The easiest example of a disposition is curiosity. It is not an item of knowledge, or a skill, or attitude or value. It is the habit of being nosy or inquisitive. Think, if you will, of the distinction between having reading skills and having the disposition to be a reader. Teachers often say they are teaching listening skills. Most children have them; just try whispering! What they may not have is the disposition to be listeners, or perhaps they manifest the disposition selectively!

Inasmuch as we cannot hope to teach children, or university students for that matter, everything they need to learn, a major focus of education at every level should be to strengthen the disposition to go on learning. Any education that undermines the inborn disposition to learn is miseducation. When it comes to early childhood education, I suggest a *damaged disposition hypothesis*, namely that if formal instruction is introduced too early, to intensely and too abstractly, the children may indeed learn the instructed knowledge and skills, but they may do so at the expense of the disposition to use them. It is not an either/or matter. One needs both the skills and the dispositions to use and apply them. Careful attention to both kinds of learning should minimize the risks of damaging the dispositions in question. A major consideration here is that when dispositions are damaged, e.g. the disposition to learn, the disposition called interest, and so forth, they are extremely difficult to put back into the child later.

Furthermore, dispositions cannot be learned from instruction. The most important dispositions are inborn. Others are learned by being around people who have them and who make them visible--both desirable and undesirable ones.

Academic versus intellectual goals. Along similar lines, I want to encourage all of us to make a distinction between academic and intellectual goals. The term *academic* has many meanings, one of which is "of little practical value"! The term originally referred to being--as it were--above the fray in an ivory tower.

In today's discourse about the early years curriculum--at least in the US--academic goals are served by presenting children with worksheets, drills, and other kinds of exercises designed to start children on basic literacy and numeracy skills. More generally academic exercises present fundamental operations in reading and arithmetic (versus mathematics). According to Doyle (1986), academic tasks are small, disembedded items usually taught in isolation, requiring a right answer, relying heavily on memory, the application of formulae, algorithms (versus understanding), and the breaking of codes and regurgitating the specific items learned from instruction. Furthermore, academic tasks are devoted to incremental rather than insight learning. I do not wish to imply that academic tasks are never useful or appropriate. On the contrary, they have an important place in education--**as children grow older.** In other words, the inclusion of academic tasks in the curriculum is not merely an educational issue, it is a developmental issue as well.

Intellectual goals and activities, on the other hand, are focused on the life of the mind in its fullest sense, including its aesthetic, moral and spiritual sensibilities. The formal definition of "intellectual" emphasizes rational rather than emotional processes, the processes of reflection and creative use of the mind. I suggest that instruction is a sub-category of teaching that focuses on covering the subject rather than uncovering it. What seems to me especially appropriate for the early years is to uncover subjects worthy

of children's attention, unpacking the familiar so as to help children to achieve a deeper, fuller and more accurate understanding of things within and around them worth knowing more about.

The most important intellectual dispositions are inborn and must be strengthened rather than undermined by premature academic pressures. By way of example, the disposition to make sense of experience is inborn in all humans. Included in this list also are the dispositions to hypothesize, analyze, synthesize, predict, wonder, conjecture, and to be empirical. Young children are natural born scientists, anthropologists, linguists, so eager to test their hypotheses and predictions that without appropriate supervision, many toddlers may inflict serious bodily harm on themselves, and most certainly wear out their caretakers! We should also add here numerous social dispositions--perhaps not as natural or inborn as the intellectual ones--such as to be cooperative, magnanimous, to facilitate others' efforts, to collaborate, and so on.

Again, if these dispositions are not strengthened and appreciated, or are otherwise undermined, they are very difficult to replace later in life. Thus such dispositions merit concern when considering the long term consequences rather than short term gains accrued by the experiences we provide to young children.

In sum, I suggest that high quality teaching and a good curriculum for young children are focused on the strengthening of intellectual dispositions, and that furthermore, that we know how to do that. Such good quality early years programs were not hard to find in the UK during the so-called Plowden years. They can now be seen in the preprimary schools of the northern Italian city of Reggio Emilia (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1993).

The role of play. I am not certain of the meaning of the term "purposeful play" used in the RSA report. Perhaps I fail to grasp its particular associations in the educational discourse of the UK. In my vocabulary, the expression "purposeful play" is a contradiction in terms. Play, by definition, is activity with no prespecified goals or ends. Playfulness refers to spontaneous interactions with others, and with objects, just to see what might happen for its own sake. No doubt much can be learned from spontaneous play and it should be part of any program for children. Perhaps the term is used in the report to refer to imaginative rather than merely fanciful and frivolous activity, and I have not caught the intended reference accurately.

Furthermore, I sometimes wonder if the tradition of emphasizing the importance of play in our field originated at a time when children played too little. It is my impression of many of our children today that they do practically nothing else! A great deal of their time and energy is taken up with playful, amusing and entertaining activities.

The main point I want to emphasize here is that while it is clearly the case that young children naturally learn through play, it is not the only natural way that children learn. It is just as natural for children to learn through observation and investigation. Indeed, all young mammals naturally learn through play, and through observation and investigation. I suggest that a good curriculum for young children capitalizes and even "exploits" these last two dispositions. I suggest that young children should be engaged in observations and investigation of things and events in their own experience and environment worth knowing more about. Not everything is equally worthy of children's energy and time. As Dewey pointed out, one of the responsibilities of adults is to educate children's attention.

Furthermore, I believe that many of us seriously underestimate children's intellectual powers when we imply that children have to have fun or that learning should be fun. Some of the time, of course. But fun is a cheap goal. I suggest that enjoyment is not a goal of education; it is the goal of entertainment. One of the important goals of education, at every level, is to engage the learner's mind in worthwhile intellectual activity. I believe that when we do that well, the learner finds the experience enjoyable and satisfying. But the enjoyment and satisfaction are side-effects or by-products of good teaching and a good curriculum, and not their goal.

Autonomous learning. I note in the early childhood literature in the US as well as in the RSA report, an increasing emphasis on autonomous learning, sometimes termed independent learning. It not clear what these phrases mean in discussions of curriculum goals for young children. Furthermore, whatever meanings are intended, their inclusion among goals seems anomalous in the light of increasing use of terms like *social constructivism* and related references to the work of Vygotsky and his concept of the zone of proximal development. The latter seem to me to draw our attention to the essential social nature of learning and development. Why is early autonomy and independence so important when we are not so sure we want our adolescents to be independent and autonomous?

In contrast, it seems to me, what is required is to strengthen children's dispositions to be competently *interdependent*, to be capable of effective collaboration and cooperation, argument and discussion, and to be able to prize and be enriched by the differences within and among peer groups.

The Inside Perspective on Quality

The quality of an early childhood program as perceived from the inside, that is, by the staff, includes criteria falling into three dimensions: (a) colleague relationships, (b) staff-parent relationships, and (c) relationships with the sponsoring agency.

Colleague relationships. It is highly unlikely that an early childhood program can be of high quality on the criteria thus far suggested unless the staff relationships within it are also of good quality. Assessment criteria for this aspect of quality would be based on how each member of the staff might answer such questions as:

- On the whole, are relationships with my colleagues:
    - supportive rather than contentious?
    - cooperative rather than competitive?
    - accepting rather than adversarial?
    - trusting rather than suspicious?
    - respectful rather than controlling?

In principle, good quality environments cannot be created for children (in the bottom-up sense) unless the environments are also good for the adults who work in them. Of course, there may be some days when the experiences provided have been "good" for the children at the expense of the staff (for example, Halloween celebrations), and some days when the reverse is the case; but on the average, a good quality program is one in which both children and the adults responsible for them find the quality of their lives together satisfying and interesting.

Staff-parent relationships. It seems reasonable to assume that the relationships between the staff and the parents of the children they serve can have a substantial effect on many of the criteria of quality already proposed. In addition, I suggest that the criteria to be used here could include the way each staff member would answer questions such as those below.

On the whole

- Are my relationships with parents satisfying?
- Do I feel effective in my relations with parents?
- Are my efforts appreciated by the families?
- Are my views and preferences for the goals of the program respected (not necessarily agreed with)?

Certainly parents are more likely to approach teachers positively when teachers themselves initiate respectful and accepting relationships. However, in a countries like the US and the UK, with their highly mobile and diverse populations, it is unlikely that all the families served by a single program, or an individual teacher, are in complete agreement on the program's goals and methods. This lack of agreement inevitably leads to some parental dissatisfaction and parent-staff friction.

The development of positive, respectful and supportive relations between staff and parents who share a background of culture, language, and ethnicity is relatively easy and can be achieved by untrained staff. But the development of such relationships between staff and parents of diverse backgrounds requires staff professionalism that includes insight and judgment based on a combination of experience, training, and education, as well as personal values.

Staff-sponsor relationships. One potential indirect influence on the quality of a program is the nature of the relationships of staff members with those to whom they are responsible. It seems reasonable to suggest that, in principle, teachers and caregivers treat children very much the way they themselves are treated by those to whom they report. To be sure, some caregivers and teachers rise above poor treatment, and some fall below good treatment. But one can assume that in principle, good environments for children are more likely to be created when the adults who staff them are treated appropriately on the criteria implied by the questions listed below. Note also that a recent study by Howes and Hamilton (1993) calls attention to the potentially serious effects of staff turnover on children's subjective experiences of the program. Thus the extent to which program sponsors provide contexts hospitable and supportive of staff should be given serious attention in assessing program quality. Assessment of quality in terms of this dimension of the inside perspective would be based on the staff's answers to the following questions:

- Are working conditions adequate to encourage me to enhance my knowledge, skills, and career commitment?

- Is the job description and career advancement plan appropriate?

- Am I usually treated with respect and understanding?

- Are those to whom I report usually supportive and encouraging?

Once again, not all negative responses are necessarily and directly attributable to the sponsors or administrators of a program, and the extent to which they are so would have to be determined as part of an assessment procedure.

The Outside-In Perspective on Quality

Ideally, assessment of the quality of a program should include the quality of parent-teacher relationships (See NAEYC, 1991a & b, pp. 101 - 110). Such assessments depend on how each parent would answer such questions as:

In my relationships with staff they are:

- primarily respectful, rather than patronizing or controlling?
- accepting, open, inclusive, and tolerant, rather than rejecting, blaming, prejudiced?
- respectful of my goals and values for my child[4]?
- welcoming contacts that are ongoing and frequent rather than rare and distant?

As suggested earlier, the positive attributes of parent-teacher relationships suggested as criteria of quality above are relatively easy to develop when teachers and parents have the same backgrounds, speak the same languages, share values and goals for children, and in general, like each other. But the development of such positive relationships between staff and parents of diverse backgrounds and cultures requires true professionalism.

Parents are also more likely to relate to their children's caregivers and teachers in positive ways when they understand the complex nature of their jobs, appreciate what teachers are striving to accomplish, and when they are aware of the conditions under which the staff is working.

Of course, it is possible that negative responses of some parents to some of the questions listed above cannot be

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[4] The concept of respect does not imply agreement or compliance with the wishes of the other.

attributed directly to the program and the staff, but have causes that staff may or may not be aware of, or able to determine.

Before we turn to the last perspective, I want to comment on some of the issues raised in the RSA "Start Right" report. For example, I note a strong emphasis on the equality of parents and professionals. This position is problematic for several reasons. Parents and professionals are equal in some respects, and not others; they are of course, equally human, with all that implies! But to be a professional means to make decisions and exercise judgment on the basis of specialized knowledge and principles and the collected wisdom and warranted assumptions that constitute that body of knowledge and principles (See Katz, 1995, Chapter 14).

Furthermore, while the roles of parents and teachers in children's development may be complementary, they are distinctive in important ways (see Katz, 1995, Chapter 10). Teachers exercise judgment based on their responsibility to and for a whole group of children, and each and every child equally. Parents are and should be primarily concerned with their own individual child's needs, biased and partial toward their own children. Teachers work from a baseline of knowledge of very many, sometimes hundreds of young children, whereas parents know intimately a very few of them. Thus their judgments about appropriate actions are likely to be distinctive, as they probably should be. Teachers make decisions based on their rational analyses of the situations they are in. Parenting is largely (and ideally optimally) irrational, and based on very deep feelings and attachment to their own young.

Perhaps the most important distinction between the two roles is the extent to which they are enacted intentionally; parenting should be optimally spontaneous or "natural;"

teaching is a set of complex actions deliberately designed to bring about intended learning. A professional teacher is sensitive to parents' views and preferences, but not intimidated by or indulgent of them. A professional teacher strives to resist the temptation to take criticism personally, and is committed to responding to it professionally with a problem-solving focus.

It is interesting to note that the study of parents' views of their children's preschool programs in eleven countries conducted by the International Association for the Evaluation of Education (Olmstead and Weikart, 1994) showed that, with the exception of Hong Kong, the overwhelming majority of the parents reported being satisfied with them, even though the within-country experts were not. These findings are difficult to interpret. However, it may be accounted for, at least in part, by the possibility that if parents place their children in programs with which they are dissatisfied they would surely have to experience guilt in addition to that they may already feel by turning a large proportion of their young child's care to others (Katz, 1994).

I suggest that parents are not teachers' customers; they are their clients. As such teachers must act in terms of what they judge to be in the children's best interests rather than in terms of what will make parents "buy" the program. Parents must be heard, listened to, and understood in the context of *deliberation* about best steps to be taken, rather than to be engaged in *debate*, the object of which is for one side or the other to win. Again, good, respectful and constructive teacher-parent relationships requires of teachers professionalism based on the best available knowledge and principles concerned (See Katz, 1995, Chapter 14).

For all of the reasons outlined above, it seems unwise to recommend the professionalisation of parenthood. By definition, parents must exercise their very considerable power over their own children *particularistically*, i.e. in terms of their own goals, preferences, cultures and lifestyles and the characteristics of their own particular child. Similarly, I suggest we avoid language such as "parents are their child's first teachers" and stress that **parents are their children's first parents.**

Professionals, on the other hand, approach their clients *universalistically*, i.e. exercising their powers to support and enhance growth, learning, and development with the same whole-hearted commitment to and concern for every single child for whom they are responsible, whether they like the child or not, whether they are in the mood or not, and to the same high standard on each and every occasion.

Furthermore, if a nation makes a commitment to "train" all parents or even to "professionalise" them as suggested in the RSA report, who is to make the decision about what constitutes good parenting? Psychologists? Pedagogues? Government officials? Politicians? In democracies like ours, such a commitment seems out of place!

I would also like to sound a caution that in our attempts to increase the participation and involvement of parents in their children's early education and to respect their views, that we guard against enhancing their sense of importance and their power by putting professionals down. There seems to be a great temptation to "empower" parents by disdaining professionals. But both groups merit respect.

Keep in mind also that professionals are those who in fact did get a "right start" and did gain knowledge and skills and understandings and the other goals of the curriculum outlined in the RSA report! The discourse in which

professionals are glibly referred to as less than well-intended when they are in fact among those who did get a "right start" and are trying to contribute to their communities--often with little compensation or respect--seems to be anomalous.

It is interesting to note that the current increasing trend toward specialization, producing specialized expertise as the knowledge base expands seems to collide with strong public and political sentiments against professionals and experts[5] that appears to be widespread in some of our countries. It is manifested in the USA by the frequent inclusion of individuals from the business and corporate world on panels, task forces, commissions, and advisory boards expected to produce sound recommendations for educational reform. These non-educators are asked to serve as chairpersons frequently as a way to circumvent the professionals and experts thought to have merely a vested interest in the *status quo*. This strategy betrays an assumption that the obvious interest that business and corporate leaders have in the outcomes of education can make up for their lack of expertise and experience in the field for which they are supposedly generating better ideas, and

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[5] Doubts about the practical value of expertise are not limited to education. Dunn (1993) makes the case that those countries with the most winners of Nobel Prizes in economics have the worst economies; those with substantial numbers of active economists have the next worst economies, and "There have been no Nobel prizes for economists from Germany or Japan. Nor have there been prizes for the economists of the fast-growing Asian "tigers" such as Taiwan, South Korea and Singapore." (p. 4). He further states that macroeconomics cannot be observed directly and therefore must be understood through models, and models are never defeated by facts, but by competing models. He adds "This sometimes leaves governments with little alternative to basing policies on theories that fly in the face of experience, until better theories are developed. As a last resort, they might want to look around and see what is actually happening. But that will never win you a Nobel prize." (p. 4).

that this ignorance puts them at an advantage over professionals and experts!

Many of the school reforms introduced in the US in the last decade are punitive in tone. Some seem to be at cross-purposes. Political pressures have lead to the encouragement of the decentralization of decision-making about schooling through such strategies as school-based decision-making, local (especially parental and business) input and participation in hiring staff and setting curricula. On the other hand large resources are now allocated to national curricula and national test development. These two trends seem to be another anomaly on the current scene affecting educational decision-making.

Michael Katz (1992), discussing such reforms as implemented in the city schools of Chicago, points out that these reforms

> challenge historic processes of professionalization and the ascendance of experts...Although reformers have criticized teachers harshly, they have expected them to transform their practice - by themselves, without guidance from outsiders, or under pressure from lay persons lacking professional knowledge and skill. Reform, in fact, frequently places tremendous burdens on teachers, whose effective workload expands with no compensating increase in authority or pay (M. Katz, 1992, p. 58).

But, says M. Katz, while professional expertise seems to be regarded with suspicion among reformers and activists, the latter "continue to require data - not necessarily to illuminate the issues and problems, but to support their own points of view."

A similar anomaly, already mentioned, seems to me to be the frequent allusion--especially on the part of politicians--to parents as experts, often phrased as "parents are the

best teachers," or the "first teachers," or "parents know their children best." These slogans appear at the same time that enormous resources are allocated to educate parents as to how to best prepare their children for school, rather than how to prepare the school to be ready for the children. Opinion makers and politicians seem unable to say or even believe that some parents know their children well, and some do not. Some understand their children better than others. Some parents would benefit from support and guidance from experts, and some would not. In countries like ours, parents are not a monolithic homogeneous group. Parents are just like people, after all!

The Outside Perspective

The community and the society-at-large that sponsor a program also have a stake in its quality. There is a sense in which posterity itself eventually reaps the benefits to be derived from high quality early experience for its young children, and in which all society suffers social and other costs when early childhood program quality is poor[6].

All early childhood programs, whether sponsored by private or public agencies, are influenced intentionally or by default, by a variety of policies, laws, and regulations that govern them. Assessment of quality from the perspective of the larger society should be based on how citizens and those who make decisions on their behalf might be expected to answer the following kinds of questions:

- Am I sure that community resources are appropriately allocated to the protection, care and education of our children?

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[6] One aspect of the impressive preprimary schools of Reggio Emilia in Italy is the extensiveness and depth of the involvement of the whole community in all aspects of their functioning. For an interesting description of community partnerships and early childhood programming see Spaggiari (1993)

- Am I confident that those who make decisions on our community's behalf adopt policies, laws, and regulations that enhance rather than jeopardize children's experiences in early childhood programs?

- Am I confident that the resources currently available to early childhood programs in our community are sufficient to yield long-term as well as short-term benefits to children and their families?

- Are high quality programs affordable to all families in our communities who need the service?

- Are the working conditions (salary, benefits, insurance, etc.) of the community's programs sufficiently good that the staff turnover rate is low enough to permit the development of stable adult-child and parent-staff relationships, and to permit staff training to be cost-effective?

- Are the staff members appropriately trained, qualified, supported and supervised for their responsibilities?

Since programs for young children are offered under a wide variety of auspices, each program can generate its own list of appropriate criteria for assessment from the outside perspective.

Implications of Multiple Perspectives on the Right Start.

Four implications of this formulation of quality assessment for early childhood programs are outlined below.

Discrepancies Between Perspectives. It is theoretically possible for a program for young children to meet satisfactory standards on the quality criteria from a top-down perspective, but fall below them on the bottom-up or on

the outside-inside criteria. For example, a program might meet high standards on the top-down criteria of space, equipment, or child/staff ratio, and yet fail to meet adequate standards of quality of life for some of the children according to the criteria listed for the bottom-up perspective. I suggest that classes of four-year-olds with 25 children and one adult might be just such a case! From an outside perspective such arrangements might meet criteria of cost and feasibility; from the bottom-up and the insider perspectives, such programs are likely to fall below acceptable standards of quality.

Furthermore, one of the important aspects of experience is the meaning given to it by the one who undergoes it. In much the same way that the meaning of a particular word is a function of the sentence in which it appears and the paragraph in which it is embedded, humans tend to attribute and assign meanings to their experience in one situation based on their experiences in all other contexts. This being the case, the bottom-up perspective needs to take into account the likelihood that the stimulus potential of a preschool program for a particular child is a function of the stimulus level of the environment he or she experiences outside the program (Katz, 1989).

For example, a child whose home environment includes a wide variety of play materials, television and video shows, computer games, outdoor play equipment, frequent trips to playgrounds, and so forth, may find a preschool program boring that another child, whose home environment lacks the same degree of variety finds engaging. Such individual differences in the experiences of children in early childhood programs, i.e. the range of bottom-up perspectives, should be taken into account in assessing the quality of a program, and

be considered in weighing the importance of the top-down criteria.

In theory at least, a program could fall below acceptable standards on the top-down criteria (e.g. insufficient space or poor equipment) and yet be experienced as satisfactory by most of the participating children. Since I am suggesting, however, that it is the view from the bottom-up that determines the ultimate impact of a program, some flexibility in applying the top-down criteria of quality might be appropriate.

It is also conceivable that the staff might have appropriate relationships with parents, but with few of the children. Or it could be that children are thriving, but parents do not feel respected or welcomed by the staff.

On the other hand, it could be that the bottom-up assessments are low, but the program is rated high in quality from an outside-inside parental perspective, or vice versa. For example, a staff may feel obliged to engage children in academic exercises in order to satisfy parental preferences even though the children's lives might be experienced as more satisfying if informal and more intellectually meaningful experiences were offered. In such instances the bottom-up assessment of quality is less positive than the one from the outside-in perspective.

Thus theoretically, it is possible that from these multiple perspectives, levels of satisfaction on the criteria proposed could vary significantly. This raises the question: Should one perspective be given more weight than another in assessing the quality of a program? If so, whose perspective has the first claim to determining program quality?

Accountability Determination. As suggested above, program providers can hardly be held accountable for all

negative responses on the criteria listed for each perspective. Some children come to a program with problems of long standing that originated outside of it. Similarly, parents and staff may register low satisfaction on one or more of the criteria due to factors not attributable to the program itself. Some families may be struggling with the vicissitudes of their own lives in ways that influence their responses to the program but are not necessarily attributable to it.

Problems of attributing the causes of clients' perspectives on a program raise the difficult question of establishing the limits to which the staff can be fairly held accountable. As suggested above, the staff of a program is not obliged to keep everyone happy all of the time as much as it is required to apply the professionally accepted procedures appropriate for each case. The analogy here is with the professional practice of the physician. She is not obliged to keep everyone free of all pain, illness, and living for ever. What is required is to apply the accepted and available expertise, treatments, procedures, and knowledge agreed upon by the profession to be appropriate to each case. The application must be made carefully, thoroughly, and wholeheartedly to each and every patient on each and every occasion. If cures and treatments are not available for all cases, the license to practice is not withdrawn, though it may be and should be when the accepted practices are not so applied.

This analogy implies that the profession has indeed adopted a set of criteria and standards of appropriate practice. The view of the limits of staff accountability proposed here implies that at least one essential condition for high quality programs is that all staff members are qualified and fully educated to employ the accepted

practices, accumulated knowledge, and wisdom of the profession--such as it is at present. To be able to respond professionally to each negative response from the bottom-up or outside-inside perspectives requires well-educated and qualified staff with ample professional experience--especially in the case of the program director. This view of the limits of staff accountability also emphasizes the urgency for the profession to continue the development of a clear consensus on professional standards of practice below which no practitioner can be allowed to fall.

The field of early childhood education in the US has already taken important preliminary steps in the direction of establishing consensus on criteria and standards of practice through the professional association's position papers on major issues. The most comprehensive document currently available in the US is that of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) titled Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs serving children from birth through age 8. (Bredekamp, 1987), currently undergoing revision. It seems to me the work on "Foundations for Learning" reported at this RSA Conference by Hurst, Ouvry and Burgess-Macey currently under way at Goldsmith's College, London, can be the basis for the development of professional standards in the UK.[7]

One of the special problems of the field of education in general, and early childhood education in particular, is that it suffers serious weaknesses in its data base, as Kathy Sylva's paper at this conference reminds us. The weaknesses are inevitable, in part because the main client--the young child--is in a period of rapid growth, making accurate

[7] For further information inquiries should be addressed to Dee Seymour, Secreatry, Quality in Diversity Project (Information), Department of Educational Studies, Goldsmiths' College, Lewisham Way, London, SE14, 6NW. England, UK.

attributions of effects on development and learning difficult. Furthermore, the definitive experiments that could settle the main issues of the field would be unethical to perform (See Katz, 1995, Chapter 15). This data weakness creates a vacuum naturally and readily filled by ideologies. Thus early childhood education, and perhaps education in general, is highly susceptible to ideologies that fill the vacuum and cause the sometimes acrimonious ideological disputes that mark the history of the field. Our only recourse is to come together on occasions like this one and to put our ideas out on the table to be examined and criticized, and to engage in *deliberation* rather than debate in order to arrive at the best possible judgements and best warranted assumptions.

In addition, the accreditation procedures and standards of NAEYC's National Academy of Early Childhood Programs (NAEYC, 1991a) covers most of the items implied by the criteria outlined above. Several position statements on curriculum content and assessment (NAEYC, 1991b; Bredekamp and Rosegrant, 1992) have also been issued by NAEYC. NAEYC's new National Institute for Early Childhood Professional Education is designed to address professional development, qualifications, and other issues directly and indirectly related to staff accountability for implementing professionally accepted practices.

In the case of child care programs in particular, the high rate of staff turnover, related largely to appallingly low compensation and poor working conditions in the US (See Whitebook, Phillips, & Howes, 1993; Whitebook, 1994) and many other countries, exacerbates the problems of retaining staff with the qualifications and experience required for good quality programs.

Criteria and Standards. Any kind of assessment requires the selection of criteria and the adoption of standards at which the criteria must be met to satisfy judgments of good quality. As suggested above, each question in each of the lists above implies a criterion of quality. For the purposes of this discussion, a *criterion* is a characteristic or attribute of a phenomenon or event that can be used as a basis for judging its quality. A *standard* is a specific level of quality on the criterion. Thus, for example, a program could be judged on the top-down criterion of ratio of adults to children; the standard of quality might be set at 1:5, 1:10, or 2:25, etc., depending on the ages of the children.

Similarly, for the first criterion listed for the bottom-up perspective: "Do I usually feel welcome rather than captured?" a standard would have to be set as to how intense, constant or enduring such feelings would have to be to meet a standard of acceptable or unacceptable quality. A four- or five-point scale on each criterion continuum is likely to be sufficient for most purposes. However, agreement concerning the point at which a standard of quality has been satisfied must be determined by the profession and its assessors. Furthermore, whether standards of quality would have to be met on all or most or particular criteria would also have to be determined by those undertaking the assessment.

High and Low Inference Variables. Assessments based on variables like the amount of space per child, qualifications of staff, observable characteristics of staff-child interaction, and other commonly used top-down indices of quality require relatively little or low inference on the part of the assessor. However, the multiple perspectives approach involves the use of high inference variables, namely, inferring deep feelings of child and family

participants, staff, and as well as those of officials and citizens.

As already suggested earlier, it would be neither ethical nor practical to interview children directly to obtain answers to the questions posed for the bottom-up perspective. It would be ethically unacceptable to put children in situations that might encourage them to criticize their caretakers and teachers. Furthermore, from a practical standpoint, young children's verbal descriptions of their experiences are unlikely to be reliable. Thus, assessing the quality of bottom-up experience requires making inferences about the subjective states of the children. Ideally these inferences would be based on extensive contact, frequent observation, and information gathering from participants over extended periods of time. Reliable unobtrusive indices of children's subjective experiences are also required to assess quality from the bottom-up (See Goodwin and Goodwin, 1982). Such assessments require the kinds of insight and judgment that can only be available on the basis of extensive professional education and experience, and in many cases the observations and deliberations of well qualified inter-disciplinary teams.

In sum, answers to the questions posed on the criteria proposed for each perspective can be used as a basis for decisions about the kinds of modifications to be made in the services offered each individual child and the whole group of children enrolled, as well as for all of their families. In this way, each of the five perspectives outlined above contributes in a different way to an overall assessment of program quality as experienced by all who have a stake in it. However, because not all responses can be directly attributable to characteristics of a program, the early childhood profession must continue current efforts to

develop, adopt, and apply an accepted set of professional standards of practice for which practitioners can fairly be held accountable. Any approach to the assessment of quality requires not only a set of *criteria* to apply to each program, but some consensus on the minimum *standards* that must be satisfied for acceptable quality on each criterion. Further discussion of these matters among practitioners, program sponsors, regulatory agencies and membership associations in the field is urgently needed.

Recommendations and Next Steps

Teacher education. The approach to quality assessment outlined above implies an urgent need to strengthen teacher education and to eschew the language of teacher "training." The high quality of educational provisions the RSA report enjoins us to offer cannot be achieved by brief superficial technique training courses. However, in-depth professional development courses cannot be made available at present, another approach with good potential for improving the standards of practice is the provision of a high quality advisory service, as can be seen implemented in Reggio Emilia (See Filippini, 1993), and was an impressive feature of early years and infant education during the Plowden years in Britain.

Another promising approach to pre-service as well as inservice teacher education is the inclusion of the case study method in professional education courses. The case study approach requires the development of a set of cases that depict the standard predicaments that all early childhood teachers are likely to face fairly frequently, including predicaments with individual and groups of young children as well as with parents and colleagues. The cases

are then examined by students (and inservice teachers in further education classes) from many perspectives: cultural, psychological, developmental, pedagogical, philosophical, practical, administrative, historical, and other major disciplinary perspectives. Emphasis in such case studies would be not only on the acquisition of knowledge and skills, but also on the development of the students' insight and judgement that should come into play in the typical predicaments they are likely to encounter in their daily practice.

Mixed-age grouping. Mixing the ages in early childhood education--sometimes called family or vertical grouping--is certainly not new. What is new is the growing body of pertinent evidence that there are important *potential* intellectual as well as social benefits to be gained from mixing ages--when it is done well. I would also like to emphasize that in such arrangements young children can have early satisfying experiences of nurturing and caring for and about younger others, and can make genuine (not phony) contributions to each others' learning and well-being (See Katz et al. 1991). When the younger children have opportunity to observe their older classmates as models of such nurturant and helpful behavior, they in turn can manifest the same when in turn they are the older members of the class. While it is not natural for young children to spend large proportions of time in litters, we seem to insist that they be educated in them!

I also strongly recommend increasing the opportunities for adolescents to assume some responsibility for young children--where possible, as part of the school day. There is some informal evidence to suggest such adolescents are likely to postpone their own child-bearing from such exposure!

Parent cooperative model adaptations. Like many other "senior" early childhood educators in the US, my interest in the field grew out of five years of participation as a mother in parent cooperative nursery schools in California. To this day I still count as valuable much of the experience, knowledge, and insight gained during those years. I learned much that helpled me with our own three children; learned from the other families, and especially from the teachers! I also taught in a parent cooperative nursery school before undertaking graduate study.

As far as I know, the parent cooperatives in the US are somewhat different from the preschool playgroups in the UK and in New Zealand. In the US, while there has always been some diversity in the arrangements, the cooperative nursery schools were typically owned and operated by the parents. But the directors (depending on the number of classes) and teachers were very highly trained and experienced professionals, often with advanced degrees in early childhood education. These directors and teachers were the employees of the local school district adult education division. They were hired by the adult education division of the local school district to teach the children and parents together. As such, the staff had fairly decent salaries. But the programs were nevertheless affordable to young famlies.

In the early days of the parent co-ops, parents--usually mothers--participated in their child's class one morning a week as assistants to the trained teacher, helping with all the daily activities of the class. Attendance at weekly evening parent education classes was an obligatory part of parent participation. The classes were conducted by the teachers to help parents learn to work with the children in the classroom, as well as to support them in their own parenting roles with knowledge, information, and guidance in

child rearing. These arrangements meant that a qualified teacher worked daily with twenty to twenty-five preschoolers and four or five assisting mothers, occasionally fathers too.

Although parent cooperative nursery schools still exist in the US, the increasing full time employment of mothers has led to a substantial decline in their numbers (Shaw, 1992). However, increasing national commitment to parent involvement, and concern for the welfare of families and family values suggests that it might be timely to think of ways to adapt the parent cooperative approach to the needs of today's parents.

The key feature of the co-op approach is the regular participation of parents--mothers, fathers, other major caretakers of the child--in the child's preschool program. While it is difficult to estimate what such arrangements might cost, employers with <u>real</u> commitment to family values should be persuaded to support a special ***parental preschool participation leave*** program as a job benefit. Ideally it would consist of paid leave (perhaps subsidized by the local authority for some small business employers). The leave program would consist of perhaps one morning or one afternoon every two or three weeks to be devoted <u>only</u> to the parent's [or primary caretaker's] in-classroom participation in his or her child's preschool as an assistant to the child's teacher. Any government that claims to be concerned about family values might consider the following possible benefits such parental preschool participation paid leave might yield:

- *Parents and children have common experience.* Regular parent participation in the preschool class can make possible frequent experience within the classroom that is shared by the parent and child. Such joint activity and common experiences can strengthen the parent's

understanding of his and her own child. Furthermore, by getting to know the child's friends and becoming aware of favorite and non-favorite activities, the parent can enjoy conversing with his or her child in rich detail about experiences the child has when they were apart. Because working parents and their children are separated for large proportions of their daily lives, the development of the kind of common ground that can serve as a basis for animated and real discussion, reflection, and sharing is otherwise difficult. Regular participation in the classroom, plus frequent contact at drop-off and pick-up time, could substantially enrich both parents' and children's feelings of shared experiences.

- *Parents and teachers learn from each other in ways that help the child.* As in the traditional parent co-ops, a teacher who is well qualified to work with both children and with parents can help parents with a wide variety of skills and knowledge useful for living with preschoolers. The teacher can also offer support to these families in times of special stress.

  The teacher also has much to gain in the way of important understanding, appreciation, and knowledge of the children's background and culture from meaningful and regular contact with parents in the setting.

- *Gaining perspective on one's own child's development and learning.* Regular participation in their child's class can help parents put their own child's development and behavior into wider perspective and

thus more fully understand and value the normal characteristics of children during the early years.

- *Meaningful participation in one's own child's preschool may help alleviate parental guilt.* Regular meaningful participation in one's own child's class may help alleviate some of the sense of guilt many parents of young children feel about having to be away from them daily for long periods during their most formative years.

- *The teacher's isolation is reduced.* The teachers' own role can be much more stimulating in the company of the variety of participating parents who are naturally highly motivated to provide good experiences for the children, than when they are working alone. In addition, the participation of parents on a daily basis can help minimize the sense of isolation experienced by many teachers who work all day long with groups of very needy young children.

- If a parent can participate in his or her own child's class regularly two or three times a month, the ratio of adults to children in the class can be substantially increased. In other words, the teacher would have at least two or three (sometimes more) additional adults daily who share a real interest in what happens in the class and who are there to assist her in enriching the activities and experiences available to the children.

Based on the experience of thousands of families in the parent cooperatives I have no doubt that the long term

benefits of a parental participation leave program would be deep and significant and ultimately far outweigh the costs. I would urge you to recommend at least some experiments and pilot projects along these lines conducted perhaps by large employers, and to study these arrangements carefully to provide evidence of its potential benefits, and to alert us to its risks and problems.

Cautions and Precautions. I want to suggest that we must all be careful not to over-promise what can be achieved by high quality early childhood programs. While I am convinced that poor quality programs can harm young children, I suggest that we cannot guarantee that children with good early experiences will not encounter difficulties later in life. Like good nutrition, a good start is likely to have provide children with strong resistance to various threats to their health. But without good and sufficient nutrition later on, in fact all through their growing years, they can still suffer serious damage to their bodies. Children need good education all through lives. Much might be gained by joining forces with those concerned with the quality of education at least during the primary years. Furthermore, we cannot afford to overlook the strong impact of the larger culture on children's development. As Philip Gammage reminded us, our children spend far more time being exposed to the media than to the schools.

As you approach those in decision-making roles and attempt to enlighten them on the policy and funding changes needed to enhance the quality of children's lives, keep in mind that only from the distance does someone else's job look easy! Many who serve us in decision-making roles are caught in complex situations and conflicting pressures that look easy from our distance. Similarly, only from their distance do our jobs look easy! After all, teachers of young children

are doing what "comes naturally" or is "second nature" to anyone who has children! If we are going to get the ears of such persons we must speak clearly, articulately about what we do and what we do not know. Our communications should not be shrill, but reasonable. Such graceful and thoughtful strategies tend to be disconcerting to bullies!

Conclusion

Finally each and all of us must come to see that the well-being of our own individual children is intimately linked to the well-being of all other people's children. After all, when one of our own children needs life-saving surgery, someone else's child will perform it. When one of our own children is harmed by violence on the streets, someone else's children will commit it. But to worry about the well-being of all other people's children is not just a practical matter. It is also right.

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